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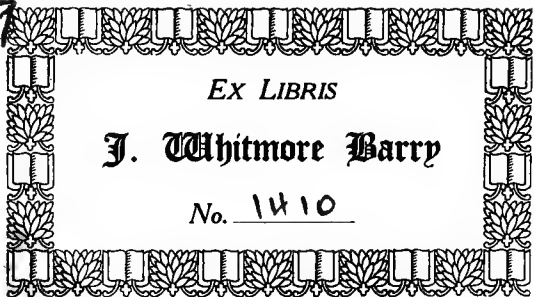
JUDGMENT

BY JOSEPH CAMPBELL



THE ABBEY THEATRE SERIES

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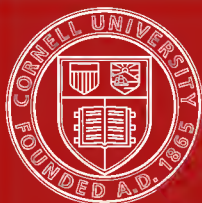
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JUDGMENT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Mountainy Singer. Poems.
Mearing Stones. Notes in Donegal ; illustrated by the Author

JUDGMENT

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS
BY JOSEPH CAMPBELL

MAUNSEL & CO., LTD.
DUBLIN AND LONDON

1912

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10

N. C.

PREFACE

JUDGMENT is founded on a story told me by a man who knew Peg Straw, and who was present at her wake. The only points in which the play differs from his story are that I have omitted a miracle which, the storyteller informed me, happened on the second night of the wake (it was noticed that although the candles lighted about the corpse had been burning for forty-eight hours they were not perceptibly shortened), and I have added the loom and the birth interest as symbols of Destiny and of the wonder and persistent newness of human life. "All events," says Marcus Aurelius, "turn out justly. If you look closely, you will not only see a connection between causes and effects, but a sovereign distribution of justice, which broods in the administration, and gives everything its due."

The play is in the modern manner, using peasants as my protagonists instead of kings—who, like Pharaoh, are "but a cry in Egypt," outworn figures in these days with no beauty and no significance. It is a study in suggestion, rather than statement. Art is concerned little with dogma, but much with the verities that are mysteries, and that always will remain mysteries, label them how we may.

J. C.

CHARACTERS

OWEN BAN, *A weaver.*

NABLA, *His wife.*

PARRY CAM, *A very old man.*

KATE KINSELLA, *A midwife.*

JOHN GILLA CARR, }
COLUM JOHNSTON, } *Neighbours.*
PETER MACMANUS, }

PATCHEEN, *A boy.*

PEG STRAW, sometimes called "The Light
Woman," *A tramp.*

A STRANGER, *Supposed to be her son.*

FATHER JOHN, *The priest of the parish.*

OTHER MEN AND WOMEN.

The action takes place in the mountainous country south of Lochros Beg Bay, Co. Donegal. The first Act passes on an evening of mid-winter; the second Act two nights after.

JUDGMENT

ACT I.

SCENE.—*A poor cabin interior. Hearth fire, right. Door leading out to causeway, left. Hand-loom and four-pane window, back left. Table forward, with some lengths of dyed yarn on it, and a roll of homespun cloth. An oil lamp, without chimney, hangs over the loom, casting deep shadows on the walls. There is a dresser, the top shelf lined with books; and a weight and chain clock wags close by. It is going on for six in the evening. The loom clacks noisily as the curtain rises. Owen Ban, the weaver, is a man of about thirty. He is pale-faced and meagre in figure, but his movements have a certain dignity. He is book-learned, and seems to see visions at times. Nabla, his wife, is twenty-seven. She finishes up tidying about the dresser and sits down. She is pregnant and, owing to her condition, inclined to hysteria. Owen stops the loom for a moment to dress a frayed thread.*

NABLA (*casually*). Quit that piece, Owen. (*He doesn't answer her. Louder.*) Quit it, I say. You'll be tired and you working at it since daylight.

OWEN. I am tired, Nabla . . . but a weaver has his thoughts . . . and I'm bound to Toal a-Groarty to have the web ready come Friday for the fair.

NABLA. The gombeen! He's a grasping old skin, anyway.

OWEN (*rising and looking about for something*). Where's that dressing noggin?

He crosses over, right, and takes down a noggin from the

Judgment

chimney board. He is in his bare feet. He hums a snatch of "The Fanad Grove" as he goes back again to his seat.

NABLA (*not to be put off*). You must have it ready, and sorrow all you'll get for it then.

OWEN (*quietly*). I'll get its value, I suppose.

NABLA. Its value! (*Turning round.*) It was a black day for you, Owen, you ever got in his book. The best of Maum mountain is in it, barring only Parry Cam and Mor, my father's cousin, who have the pension.

OWEN. Well, Toal has his faults, I'll allow, as we all have, but he isn't the worst of the Groartys.

NABLA (*bitterly*). There never was a good one of the name!

OWEN. Easy now, Nabla. You're very contrary this night.

NABLA. It's the clean truth, isn't it?

OWEN. It may be, it may be. But, did you hear what Father John said at the Month's Mind at the Cross a' Monday? (*Emphasizing the words.*) That it was a bad thing to have a bad word of anybody. "It's not for us to judge," says he, "but to be quiet in our minds," says he, "and leave the wicked to their own ways," says he. Oh, I'm telling you, Nabla, it's not for the likes of you or me to judge Toal.

NABLA. And why isn't it, then?

OWEN. Only for him, this winter would have been a hard winter for us.

NABLA. You're always making a poor mouth, and precious little it's brought you.

OWEN. Well, two can be as thraven as one, but I'm not going to argue with you. (*With sincerity.*) There's that meal, God be thanked for it, that I fetched up on the ass's back myself, and the tea and the sugar and the bit of tobacco, that we wouldn't have if he wasn't there to give them. The work's hard, and there's a deal of making in a web, as they say, but there's a bite to be got for it.

NABLA (*wearily*). Maybe you're right, Owen. You're always right. (*They are quiet for a space, the loom going; then Nabla speaks in a frightened way.*) Owen!

OWEN (*stopping the loom*). Well, what's troubling you now?

NABLA (*desperately*). I'm coming near my time, Owen.

OWEN (*looks at her gently, gets up from his seat at the loom, and goes over to her. Stroking her.*) Be easy, dear, be easy.

NABLA (*putting her hands on his shoulders*). I'd like a blessing on the first child, Owen.

OWEN. We're a twelvemonth married, Nabla, and God will give us the child that will be the comfort to us.

NABLA. What'll we call him, Owen?

OWEN (*laughing gently*). It will be a boy, then?

NABLA (*emotionally*). God send us a son. I'd like a son.

OWEN. A man-child to be a shield to us.

NABLA (*sure of herself, and with gladness in her voice*). We'll call him Peter, for my father. It's a lucky name.

OWEN (*going back to his seat*). A lucky name! (*A pause; then, as if with foreknowledge of what is about to happen*). It's a strange thing, Birth, and it's a strange thing, Death. Birth's one thread in the frame, and Death's the thread that crosses it. I'm a young man as the world counts it, but I've the old knowledge. (*Looking at her intently.*) The Danes, Nabla . . . and the books, Nabla . . . and while the sleys do be rocking I have my thoughts.

He stops, hearing a click at the latch. Parry Cam and John Gilla Carr come in. Parry is a very old man, ninety or thereabouts, but still hale and with a tetchy, excitable manner. He is clean-shaven, except for a thin fringe of beard round his chin, and wears the skirted coat, stock, &c., of a dead generation. John Gilla Carr is a dark, heavily-built man in his prime. He might be a blacksmith, by his look.

JOHN (*entering*). God save all here.

NABLA. God save you, John.

Judgment

OWEN. And it's Parry that's in it? (*Getting up and shaking him by both hands.*) Well, well, well, well!

PARRY. It is, man, Parry himself . . . Parry Cam Aosta, that's walking these pads for longer than you'd mind. Ninety years, man, ninety years. (*He gives a little wheezy laugh.*) And now where are ye?

NABLA. He's a wonder, John.

PARRY (*sitting down on a chair near the fire*). The wonders do be happening every day, ma'am.

NABLA. 'Deed and it's true, Parry.

PARRY. As the shepherds say in the dales of Yorkshire, "This world fared never so, with wonders mo and mo!"

NABLA. It's true enough, Parry, true enough.

JOHN (*to Owen*). You're working late.

NABLA. He's at that piece, on and off, since daylight. Make him give over, John. He's blinded.

OWEN. It's a new pattern, John, a sort of criss-crass of green and madder..

JOHN (*examining the web*). That's a nice blue thread in it.

OWEN. I get the dye from the roots of the iris lily. It's a light, warm cloth. Toal fancied it the last time he was up, and I'm striving to have it ready for him again Friday.

JOHN (*sitting down*). A water mill wouldn't keep Groarty going!

NABLA (*taking advantage of the opening*). And he'd take all and give nothing for it, the sticking old grabber!

JOHN. He has enough surely and seven townlands in his hold.

OWEN (*turning the talk*). You were in Ardara the-day?

JOHN. Ay. I was in for some things, and I struck on Parry on the road and we travelled home together. (*He takes a bulky parcel out of his coat pocket.*) I was forgetting. (*To Nabla.*) Mor bid me take that up to you, Nabla. And I've the thread here. (*Nabla takes the parcels and goes to the table to examine them.*)

OWEN (*leaving the loom and going over to a chair near Parry.*) Well, I'll quit it for this night. I am tired.

PARRY. It's wrong to be working always.

OWEN. You're right, Parry.

PARRY. Look at me, now. I've put in my time easy enough. The troubles would come, to be sure . . . and I had my share of them . . . but I never fretted over them, and I took an hour off when I could get it. And that, man, is the way to live a long life. (*He gives his little laugh.*) And now where are ye?

JOHN (*chaffing him*). You were the rare sport in your day, I hear, Parry. (*Turning to Owen.*) Parry's a fancy man, you know. He learned all his tricks harvesting in the Dale Country.

PARRY (*ruffled*). Did he, then!

JOHN. Maybe I'm out, Parry; but I always heard said you were a great hand with a coursing dog.

PARRY. There's many a "heard said" story isn't true . . . Though it's no lie, mister honey, it's no lie. I'd ask for nothing better than a fine Sunday, and it after Mass, and I to be out on Maum Bog with a grew, raising a hare if I could get one, and if I couldn't, well, to be easy in my mind, easy in my mind. (*Gripping Owen's knee and speaking to him as if he were deaf.*) That's it, man, to be easy in your mind.

OWEN (*laughing*). It's the great thing, Parry. Well, I've a web on the board, there, again Friday, and this in the loom is fairly on. Another day's work will about finish it.

PARRY. There'll be a good fair a' Friday, by all signs.

OWEN. You'll be there, Parry?

PARRY. And why wouldn't I? Why wouldn't I? D'ye know, I've never missed a fair in Ardara since my brogues cost fourpence!

JOHN (*maliciously*). Barring when you were away, Parry.

PARRY. Don't be thwarting me, now. You're always thwarting me.

Judgment

JOHN (*apologetically*). I didn't mean any harm, Parry, boy.

PARRY. That's my story, and if you don't like it leave it alone. (*Crowing over him.*) And now where are ye ?

OWEN. Did you see Toal the-day ?

JOHN. I did, but I wasn't speaking to him. All my dealings were with the daughter.

OWEN. Ardara will be a stirring ground by the-morrow night.

JOHN. The tinkers are in already, Owen. And Peg Straw !

NABLA. Peg ! (*With a strange hollowness in her voice.*) I turned her from my door this very morning.

JOHN. God ! I've seen that woman drunk enough in my time, but never drunker than this day. (*To Owen.*) She was streeling about, Owen, forenent Groarty's and through the Diamond, with hardly a tack to her, braying like an ass, and a crowd of young childer after her, pulling at her and shouting, "Peg Straw, the Light Woman ! Peg Straw, the Light Woman ! Who'll touch Peg Straw ?"

OWEN. And where were the police ?

JOHN. The peelers ! (*With a gesture of contempt.*) Sitting on that seat at the barrack front, laughing at her. It's little they'll do, more than they can help.

PARRY. Ach, they're tired hounding her, so they leave her alone.

OWEN. Well, it's near about time. Isn't it a shameful thing to be annoying God's poor ?

JOHN (*coarsely*). God's poor, mareadh !

OWEN (*talking like a man in his sleep*). I turned my hand against that woman once . . .

NABLA (*surprised*). Owen !

OWEN. But I wouldn't turn it again, I wouldn't turn it again. Any man could have her, they say—but let them say that, not judging her. (*Conscious of Nabla's presence.*) God forgive me, God forgive me.

NABLA (*with emphasis*). She's a bad woman, Owen.

OWEN. Sometimes I do be thinking she was treated badly. It wasn't all her own fault, maybe.

NABLA (*harshly*). She made an ill start, and she's like to have an ill end.

OWEN. May God keep the kindness in our hearts, Nabla. It wasn't, as I say, all her own fault, maybe. The young fellows used to be baiting her, and the men jeering at her in the fairs.

NABLA. It wasn't for nothing they called her the Light Woman.

OWEN. And the very childer . . . why . . .

PARRY (*breaking in impetuously*). The young cubs! An ill rearing, they are. A gallows, unmannerly rearing. Annoying hunchbacks and ballad-singers and strollers, and old people like myself. It's well I know them! It's well I know them!

JOHN. Easy, Parry.

PARRY. It's truth I'm telling ye. The childer of this generation are the Devil's childer—tormenting, vicious imps. And now where are ye?

OWEN (*significantly*). Well, that God may better them that are to come after us. (*Nabla looks at him.*)

PARRY. Amen, say I. (*Quietly, after a pause.*) Peg Straw wasn't always Peg Straw, mind you. I saw her in her day a fresh, comely girl, as nice a girl as you'd see walking the roads. But she made a slip, God help her, she made a slip—and with one thing and another she lost respect of herself and she went to the bad.

NABLA. Tinkers' woman she turned!

OWEN. Tinkers' woman? Ay, but what drove her to it? What soured her?

PARRY. It was the childer, I say.

JOHN. The priests started it.

OWEN. And young fellows and grown men coddling her on the roads.

PARRY. Then her mind went.

OWEN. And no wonder.

JOHN. She's touched, right enough.

Judgment

PARRY. That's why she got her name, man.

JOHN (*puzzled*). How do you mean?

PARRY. She used to be going into streams, gathering water-grass . . .

JOHN (*grasping him*). Oh, ay.

PARRY. Then she dropped that, and she took to picking thraneens and bits of straw on the roads, and in haggards and places, and you'd never meet her but she'd have a bunch in her hand—about that length (*measuring*) . . . every little stalk bit off as neat as neat, and it like a scrubber or a dandy brush you'd put to a horse.

JOHN. Sure, I mind her and her "straw" as long as I mind anything.

PARRY (*dogmatically*). That's how she got her name. That's gospel.

JOHN. Did you ever hear the crack old Peter Carr—(*remembering himself and turning to Nabla*)—your father, Nabla—used to tell about her?

PARRY. What was that?

JOHN. About the hare.

PARRY (*bored*). Na!

JOHN. He was going across his own fields one day by the lea pad when he spied Peg about a perch in front. She crossed a gap, and then there was a bit of falling ground and he lost sight of her for a spell. When he came up to the gap he couldn't see her, and he stood, like, biting his thumb, wondering, when a hare as big as a cow calf jumped out right in-under his feet.

PARRY (*sneering*). And he took it for Peg?

JOHN. Well, what would you take it for yourself, Parry?

PARRY. A hare, I suppose, a heavy hare.

NABLA. 'Deed, and I often heard my father (God be good to him) tell that same story, John. She'd the Black Art, he said.

PARRY. Black Art be damned (saving your presence, ma'am)! Black Art? She was a decent girl, I tell you.

OWEN. You were talking about names. What was her right name, Parry? I never knew it.

PARRY. No more did I myself, Owen.

The door opens suddenly and Kate Kinsella appears. She is a full-bodied woman of about fifty. She has a shawl about her, half on and half off her head. She looks frightened.

OWEN. It's Kate Kinsella.

KATE (*breathlessly*). God save everybody! (*To Owen.*) Oh, Owen, there's bad work going on in the glen below this evening back.

OWEN (*half rising to his feet*). What's up, Kate?

KATE. The most lamentable shouts and screams ever you heard. It's Peg Straw.

JOHN. Well, talk of . . .

KATE. They're beating her along the glen foot.

JOHN. The tinkers, Kate?

KATE. The tinkers. There's a red nest of them camped in Maum there, since dark last night.

JOHN. God! Sure I was telling Owen they were in Ardara already for the fair. It's in Maum they're camped?

KATE. In Maum, below the waterfall.

JOHN. Fourteen or fifteen of them.

KATE. A whole school from the North. And it's day they've been making of dark with their drinking and their songs, so that a decent body couldn't rest easy in the house for them. I wouldn't stop yonder for the Forge o' Gold. They're killing the woman.

OWEN (*rising*). It's Peg Straw?

KATE. It is, Owen. I'd know her screech a mile off.

JOHN. Don't stir, Owen, don't stir. There's a score of them in it if there's one.

PARRY. It's Peg, right enough, but she'll get over it. It's not the first time she's got a loodering.

JOHN. You're safer here, Owen.

OWEN. Well, it's hard to think of a poor body in that strait, and you not able to help her.

Judgment

JOHN. Stay where you are, man. What have you to say to tinkers? Villains that are against you, cloth and kind; that would ravish your house and the woman in it, if they had the chance. They're not your sort, Owen, and it's best for you to leave them alone.

NABLA (*pathetically*). Don't leave me, Owen.

OWEN (*accepting the inevitable*). Well, there's some in the world, woman, and they get it hard.

NABLA (*hysterically*). Don't leave me, and me in the way I am!

KATE. God help you, Nabla! I might have known better than to be coming in upsetting you this way. But to tell you the truth I got so scared, and the clouds of night falling, that I said to myself, "I'll turn the key in the door, and come on down to Mor's for company." I'll sleep there the-night.

OWEN (*to John*). Go on, you, up and see what can be done.

JOHN. It's the devil to interfere between tinkers! You're a peace-loving man, and you know that.

OWEN. Maybe it's not as bad as Kate says. She's scared a bit.

KATE. It's bad enough, Owen.

JOHN (*rising*). Well, come on, Parry. We'll go. It's only drunk she is, screeching and roaring like she was forenent Groarty's this morning. Come on. I'll leave you as far as your own door.

OWEN. Ay, Parry, man. The dark's dropping, and it would be better for you to be on the road.

PARRY (*peevishly*). God help us, God help us, but it's a poor thing to be old, and you with no mind of your own, but to be doing another's bidding. (*He rises with some difficulty from his seat, muttering.*)

JOHN. I'll get help at the glen head, Owen . . . at Shanley's, maybe. Mick has a gun. (*Opening the door.*) My, but it's dark! Come on, Parry.

PARRY (*as cross as two sticks*). I'm coming. Can't you wait on an old man!

Judgment

11

JOHN (*going out*). Well, good-night to ye all.

KATE. God keep ye both.

OWEN (*to Parry*). Beannacht Dé leat, a Phárolain.

Parry is too cross to answer and hirlples out after John, muttering to himself in under-breath. Owen shuts the door, and goes over to the loom again. He takes the lamp down, and examines the web minutely. Nabla and Kate are talking together near the fire.

KATE (*confidentially*). You'll be all right, woman, never you fear. When the time comes the child comes. God's time, and no sooner.

NABLA. Mor sent the stuff up, Kate. (*She crosses to the table and shows the contents of the larger parcel to Kate.*) John Gilla Carr fetched it to me.

KATE (*feeling the cloth*). It's nice, fine cloth, and it'll be kindly on a child's skin. You've the thread?

NABLA. I have, Kate.

KATE. Well, be making the shirt, and take it easy. Don't overwork yourself, and don't be fretting, mind. (*Louder, to Owen.*) I'm away, Owen.

OWEN. Stay a bit, Kate. Nabla's uneasy.

KATE. Never mind. It's only a dog's call over the hill to Mor's. I'll sleep there the-night. She's a spare bed, and I'll be up again if you want me. (*To Nabla.*) Good-night, Nabla.

NABLA (*resignedly*). Good-night, Kate. You'll be saying a prayer for me?

KATE. I will, Nabla.

OWEN. We'll be all right, Kate. God's help is nearer than the door. Good-night to you. (*Opening the door.*) It's terrible dark. Will you want a lamp with you?

KATE. No. I can't miss the limestone pad. I'd see it and I blindfolded. (*Going out.*) Good-night to ye.

OWEN and NABLA. Good-night, Kate.

Kate goes out. The kitchen is very quiet. Nabla folds the cloth John Gilla Carr brought her and puts it over a chair back, near the fire, to air. Owen is at the dresser.

Judgment

He takes a book from the top shelf and stands with his back to Nabla, thumbing over the pages casually. After a long silence he turns round.

OWEN. I'm uneasy about that poor woman, Nabla.

NABLA. Peg Straw, is it? What is she to you or me?

OWEN (*as if inspired*). It's an old saying and a true saying, that every shuiler is Christ.

NABLA. Well, you're a curious man! I never understood you, Owen. You're too book-learned for me.

OWEN. Book-learning isn't everything. Look at Parry Cam, there. That man couldn't write his name if he was to be hanged for it . . . let alone read a book . . . and with all he'd lick a scholar.

NABLA. He's an old man and a travelled man.

OWEN. It's not age, and it's not seeing strange countries does it. It's the gift he has.

NABLA. Few have it.

OWEN (*crossing over to window, back left, and peering out between his hands*). Neither moon nor star. Only darkness, and the wind shearing. (*He turns round and stares into the almost dead fire, in a listening attitude.*)

NABLA (*curiously*). What's wrong with you?

OWEN. I thought I heard something.

NABLA. You're always hearing things. You're tired.

OWEN (*with his mind on something else*). It must have been pretty bad, by what Kate said.

NABLA. Where? In Maum?

OWEN. Ay.

NABLA. It does be quiet enough in these hills most times, quiet and lonesome enough.

OWEN. A body thinks it strange that there should be trouble here.

NABLA. Ah, there's trouble everywhere.

OWEN (*listening*). There it is again. (*A moan is heard without.*)

NABLA (*starting*). God help us!

OWEN. It's a cry, right enough. (*Another moan,*

nearer.) There it is, come to our very door! (*He runs to the door and opens it.*) Saviour God! (*He staggers back. A heap of rags crawls in, lamenting loudly. It is Peg Straw. She is on her hands and knees. Her hair is dishevelled, and blood is streaming over her temples.*) The poor soul! Och, Christ, the poor soul!

NABLA (*scrutinising her*). It's Peg Straw! Don't let that creature over the door. (*Hysterically.*) She'd bring a curse on us, Owen . . . a curse . . . and our first child going to be born.

OWEN. Easy, woman, easy . . . easy. Quiet yourself. (*To Peg.*) What's on you at all? (*Moans.*) Fetch water, Nabla. This woman's in a bad way. Look at the blood.

NABLA. I turned her from my door this very morning. I know what she is, and I won't have her in the house.

OWEN. Don't you see she's hurt? (*He lifts Peg half in his arms. Nabla shrinks away from her.*) Fetch that water, I tell you.

NABLA. I won't fetch it, and I won't have her here, hurt or no hurt. She's a bad woman, and you know it.

OWEN. Do I? (*Firmly.*) But she'll stay now that she's come to us.

NABLA. Well, it's a queer thing—a stroller to be coming in here. A stroller of the roads, and me a house-keeping woman.

OWEN. You'd have me put her out, then?

NABLA. I'd have you keep her from this house.

OWEN. Better never came into it, maybe.

NABLA. I don't see how you have the heart to say that, Owen . . . (*Piteously.*) And in the way I am!

OWEN. Bad as she is we must help her. We couldn't turn her out in that state. Fetch the water, I tell you. We'll help her, if she's to die in our hands.

NABLA (*stubbornly*). I won't fetch it.

OWEN. You won't fetch it?

NABLA. I've told you I won't.

OWEN (*bullying her*). Hell's flames, I'll make you

Judgment

fetch it! (*His face becomes deadly white.*) Where is it? Where's the water-crock?

NABLA. You'd threaten me, and me not well? (*She works herself into a paroxysm, half screams, half tears.*)

OWEN. It's not the-day nor yesterday I'm complaining of. It's been the same ever since we were married.

NABLA (*through her sobs*). I'm not well, Owen. You know that.

OWEN. Where is it? It was on that shelf this morning. (*He searches about for the water-crock, upsetting the noggin of half mouldy "dressings" and swearing violently.*) The way things are kept in this house would put bees off their journey!

NABLA. I laid it out of my hand there just before I sat down.

OWEN. You're a saint to judge anybody! You're a pattern surely! (*He grips her by the arm. He is on the verge of striking her when he recovers himself. His neck drops as if paralysed, his voice is broken.*) No, no, I couldn't, Nabla . . . I couldn't . . . God forgive me!

Nabla is convulsed, like a child after a fit of crying. She buries her face in her apron.

OWEN (*quietly*). Where is it? Where have you put it? (*He discovers the water-crock.*) Here it is. (*He empties some water into a bowl, then draws Peg into the middle of the floor and loosens her clothing. Half to himself.*) Well, chance brings us strange bedfellows! (*On his knees, washing the blood from Peg's face.*) Oh, the murderers! And there's dung all over her. She's been dragged through a dung-heap. God! Look at that. She's in a bad way, Nabla. I'm afraid I'll have to go for the priest and the police. (*Rising.*) What time is it?

NABLA. It's after the quarter . . . but don't leave me, Owen. (*She throws her arms about him.*) Don't leave me. I couldn't stop my lone with her.

OWEN. Well, it's hard to know what to do. I tell you, I'll (*he cogitates*) . . . I'll cut for Father John now—

though it's a six mile trake . . . and on my way by Mor's I'll call in, and send Kate up to you. Where's my boots? (*He takes his boots from under the loom, and sits down to put them on.*) Quiet yourself now, woman. You'll be all right when you get help.

NABLA. I'm afeard, Owen. (*Softening.*) I didn't mean to be hard with her.

OWEN. I know you didn't. You were upset. You'll be as right as right if you keep quiet.

Owen laces his boots. Nabla's manner is changed. She is quiet and in a more tractable mood. She goes to the dresser.

NABLA (*kindly*). I'll give her a sup of new milk, Owen.

OWEN. Do, Nabla, and your blessing with it. (*She fetches a mug of milk to Peg who refuses it.*) No, a sup of fresh water would be better. Stupe it to her lips, there. She's too weakly to drink.

NABLA. She's very weak.

OWEN. No wonder, after the hammering she's got. Tear a stripe off that cloth, there (*motioning to the cloth before the fire*) and wipe her face with it.

NABLA. That, Owen? I couldn't touch that.

OWEN. Why not? You've plenty of it.

NABLA (*piteously*). It's for the baby, Owen.

OWEN. Tear a bit off it! If you're kind to the stranger you'll get a blessing; (*warningly*) and if you're not, God knows what may happen. It may not be a boy at all. It may be a girl. And who's to say how childer will turn out? (*Solemnly.*) The woman that's lying there was once a child, Nabla.

NABLA (*ferovently*). I'd like a blessing. God knows I would.

OWEN. Well, you'll get it.

Nabla, half reluctantly, tears a piece off the baby cloth, dips it in the mug, and holds it to Peg's lips.

NABLA. She's easier now, I'm thinking.

Peg ceases moaning.

Judgment

OWEN. Could I be troubling you for a blanket to put under her? Or how would this do? (*He lifts the finished web of homespun from the table and half unrolls it.*) It's Toal's, but never mind Toal. We'll take it for this night. It's never like to cover better. (*He unrolls the web and folds it in four. Nabla gives him a hand. They spread it under Peg Straw. Owen then crosses to the loom and reaches behind it for his hat.*) Well, I'll cut now. Give me that staff, Nabla. (*She hands him an ash-plant from the corner.*)

NABLA. Will you put your coat on?

OWEN. I will. (*She takes his overcoat off a nail and helps him into it.*) God reward you.

NABLA (*with fear in her voice*). How long will you be, do you think?

OWEN. I'll be back by nine, if his Reverence can get the car out. It's a rough journey.

NABLA. I'll be counting the minutes till you come again.

OWEN. Don't fret now. You'll be all right. (*At the door.*) You'll be all right, you'll see. (*Going.*) And I'll send Kate up to you. (*He pulls the door to.*) Slip the bolt on the inside, Nabla. It'll be safer.

Nabla slips the bolt. She has shut out violence, she knows, but there is something else iron is not proof against. Owen goes off.

NABLA (*turning round*). It's lonesome after him. (*She confronts the body, lying motionless in the shadows. Then, as if for the first time, the tragedy of the situation breaks upon her.*) God help me! (*She half sits, half falls on the nearest chair. The silence is unbroken, save for an occasional moan from Peg Straw. The moaning gradually ceases, and Nabla's quick breathing can be heard. An awful horror takes possession of her, but after a few moments she becomes calmer and murmurs.*) Isn't she lying very quiet there? (*She rises with an effort and goes over to Peg. She looks at her. She moves back a step and gives a little cry that suggests two mysteries—the passing₂ of a life from this world,*

Judgment

17

the coming of a life into it. She whispers hoarsely.) A wake-house, and a child to be born in it! God's ways are strange. *(She is in a fainting state. Shouts can be heard off, at a great distance. It is the tinkers.)*

(THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY.)

ACT II.

SCENE—*Kate Kinsella's house, two nights after. The kitchen is spacious, and more comfortable a good deal than Owen Ban's. Dresser, left; crude pictures on walls; a grandfather clock, stopped at twelve; and hearth fire with chimney board, right. A crowd of some twenty-five or thirty men is gathered in for Peg Straw's wake. There is a small room off the kitchen, back centre, and through the open door one can see the corpse laid out on a bed, and tall white candles burning about it. Two or three women are at the door, and the voices of other women can be heard inside saying the Rosary.*)

COLUM JOHNSTON (*following up*). Well, Toal a-Groarty's a hard, twisty man.

JOHN GILLA CARR (*banding round new pipes*). Take one, a mhic. It's never lucky to refuse a pipe at a wake.

PARRY (*in a crabbed voice*). He is a hard man, but he's no harder than this pipe. It's the devil to draw. (*He mutters into himself. The men laugh.*)

COLUM. And you're the devil for talking!

PARRY. The devil for talking, is it, mister? Talking! Who talked four years off that old dun horse of yours at Ardara Fair this day? Who talked a new foreleg on to him? Not Neal Doherty there, nor John Gilla Carr, nor Parry Cam Aosta with his tide of talk, but yourself, mister honey, yourself . . . And now where are ye?

He snaps the pipe across his knee. The men laugh.

COLUM. Look at him! Parry's turned Turk now.

JOHN. Whisht, Colum. Leave him alone.

Judgment

19

COLUM. He'd anger you, that old fellow.

JOHN. Never mind him.

PARRY. Give me another pipe here. (*A pipe is handed to him. The man next him helps him to fill it.*) Talking is it? I will be talking.

COLUM. It was a good fair the-day for cloth.

JOHN. How much a bundle did you get?

PARRY (*in an audible aside*). It wasn't cloth he was selling. Na!

JOHN. Easy, Parry, easy, I'm telling you.

COLUM. But good fair or bad fair, the gombeen gets all.

JOHN. Did you see Owen Ban at Groarty's?

COLUM. I did. Soul, he was looking bad.

JOHN. We've our own troubles, and he has his.

COLUM. God! I never heard of stranger happenings. Old Peg Straw to be coming in to him, and dying on his hands.

SEVERAL MEN. God rest her.

COLUM. It'll be a hanging matter for whoever killed her.

PETER MACMANUS. And the wife taking bad, and the toadling child to be born to them.

COLUM. When was the child born?

PETER. Well, I know no more than yourself, but it was the talk of the fair this day.

JOHN. It was born about two yesterday morning.

COLUM. You were at the inquest, John?

JOHN. Ay. The peelers got wind of old Peg's death, and the crowner was sent for. He came down from Carrick this morning and there was a jury picked in Maum, and I was one of them.

COLUM. You met at the weaver's?

JOHN. Ay.

COLUM. And the mother lying bad under the same thatch?

JOHN. Well, it was this way. Father John was there overnight, and says he, "You cannot talk here, and

Judgment

a sick mother in the next room." The crowner agreed. . . . And what's best to be done," says he? Well, Kate Kinsella spoke up, and says she, "You can have my house if you like."

PETER. Kate's a wonder.

SEVERAL MEN. She's the heart of corn. God bless her.

JOHN. "I'll look after the mother and child," says she.

COLUM. And they brought the Light Woman down here?

JOHN. Ay. It was the mournfullest sight ever I saw. We took the door off its hinges, and we laid the corp on it, and we covered it with a web, and four of us carried it to the house where we're sitting this minute. It was raining; and the peelers followed after, and Father John and the crowner, and three or four women that had come up from Maum, crying, and a very old woman—Mor Piseog—singing the caoine, and Father John bidding her to be quiet. God! I'll never forget it.

COLUM. A sight like that isn't to be seen every day, God help us.

JOHN. I warrant you it isn't.

COLUM. What time did you bring her in?

JOHN. Look at the clock there.

COLUM (*looking*). It's stopped.

PARRY. You wouldn't have it going, and a corp in the house? Would you, now? Time is nothing when a body's dead.

JOHN. Owen stopped it himself. He was standing on that stone as we came for'rad the door. It was just on the stroke of twelve.

COLUM (*slowly*). It's strange what happens.

PARRY. Sure, I knew it would happen. (*The men look at him.*) I'd an insleep about it. And that grew o' Shanley's yapping these three nights back. Yapping that poor woman away, it was.

COLUM. Another of Parry's freets! It wasn't a crowing hen, Parry?

The men laugh.

PARRY. A crowing hen? (*Viciously.*) No, but a yapping dog . . . And now where are ye?

There is considerable laughter at Parry's rejoinder, followed by a lull, in which the women's voices can be heard inside murmuring the last verses of the "Salve Regina."

PETER (*piously*), Listen to them! (*The men listen.*)

JOHN. Ay. (*Taking up the thread of the talk.*) Well, Kate did all she could for them both. There's that comfort in it.

SEVERAL MEN. There is. There is that.

JOHN. She couldn't have done more.

PETER. She couldn't. She stood by Nabla in her trouble, and she gave her house to wake the stranger that was no blood to her.

COLUM. She did, I'm thinking, what any other woman would have done in the same strait.

PARRY. I don't know about that.

COLUM. You don't know?

PARRY. I've said it. There's some women . . .

COLUM. You're a hard man to please, Parry.

PARRY. There's some women and they're mortal near. It's their nature to be near. They'd begrudge a creature like Peg, there—a poor, friendless creature that had neither in her nor on her—a shake-down by the fire, or a mouldy crust to eat, itself . . . And now where are ye?

PETER. You couldn't say that about Kate, Parry, or Nabla, or any other woman in Maum.

COLUM. You couldn't, Peter.

PARRY. I'm not disparaging them, mind.

COLUM. You are disparaging them.

PARRY. Well, you're the bloody man for contradicting! (*Irritably.*) I'm not, then. I'm not disparaging them.

COLUM. Damn you, you are.

JOHN. Whisht, Colum.

PARRY (*in the manner of Sir Oracle*). I'm not disparaging them, but I say it's a woman's nature to be near with one of her own sort. And where it's not her own sort,

Judgment

like Peg Straw there, a tramping woman, or a hawking woman, or a woman with a bad name, she's worse than near—she's, she's . . . (*He is at a loss for a word*). God, what is she ?

COLUM. She's all right, Parry.

PARRY. She's the Fiend himself! (*He looks about him, with the suggestion that beyond him there is no appeal*.) And now where are ye ?

COLUM (*good humouredly*). The women are no worse than the men, Parry boy. They're better, I'm thinking. There's more expected of them.

PETER. Owen, himself, acted very decently in the matter.

JOHN. The crowner said as much. He deserved a deal of credit, he said, for the help he gave old Peg. A deal of credit. Those were his very words.

PETER. It's kind father for him to be decent. His people were that before him.

COLUM (*turning round slowly and looking into the room where Peg is laid out*). God help us, but isn't she lying quiet there ? And she roaring like a bull only two days back in Ardara.

PETER. She died quiet, I heard.

JOHN. Ay. Owen was barely gone for the priest and the peelers when Nabla, God help her, went over to her and looked at her, and she was dead.

PETER. Some die like that.

COLUM. Aunt Alley, you mind, died that way.

PARRY. Aunt Alley ?

COLUM. Ay, Parry. Old Alley Johnston that was blowed over the quarry head coming up by the short cut from Leckconnel. We were waiting on her for a week, and she talking like Solomon, and strong enough to be heard at Glen ; and one evening at dusk she went off on us, and none of us in the room. I wondered at how quiet she was keeping, and I went in to her and I lighted a candle, and she was dead.

PETER. It comes easy to most in the end.

COLUM. Death ?

PETER. Ay. Even after suffering.

PARRY. You may bar the door against tinkers, but you cannot keep Death out. It comes on feet of silk. You'll look for many things in your day, but it's the one thing you're sure to find.

SEVERAL MEN. It is, God help us !

PARRY. What did I say ?

COLUM. You said what's true, Parry, that Death's the one thing you're sure to find.

PARRY. I'm wrong. You don't find it. It finds you.

A murmur goes round the crowd. Owen Ban comes in, carrying parcels.

OWEN. God save ye, men.

SEVERAL MEN. God save you kindly, Owen.

JOHN. How is your care, man ?

OWEN. I went round by the house. The child's well, but Nabla's weakly enough.

JOHN. You've your own troubles, faith.

OWEN. Well, God's not too hard on a body. There's nothing bad that mightn't be worse. *(To Patcheen.)* You fetched the pipes in, Patcheen ?

PATCHEEN. I did, Owen.

OWEN. You're a good lad. *(Deliberately.)* Now, look at that. People say that Toal a-Groarty's a grasping man.

COLUM. And isn't he ?

OWEN. Well, if he is, I never knew it. I travelled into Ardara this morning after the crowner left, and the corp, God rest her, was laid out. I'd a web on my back, and I went up to Toal's. The shop was full, but he spied me at the door, and "Come in, Owen," says he. "You've trouble in the house, I hear ?" "I have," says I, "and not of my own making." "It's the Light Woman ?" says he. "It is," says I, "and my child's born before its time, God help me." Well, he softened, like, and, "It's strange," says he, "that old Peg should die in your house. She's a long time going the roads hereabouts, and it's many's the bit I gave to crutch her."

Judgment

COLUM. I never knew him to give much in charity.

OWEN. But who knows? It's not for us to say. I laid the web on the board, and says I, "I owe you another to that, and it's in the loom nigh finished," says I. "Na bac leis," says he. Well, would you believe it—he bestowed me the pipes you're smoking, and what I have in my arms here, and he'll bury old Peg decently in Mevagh churchyard beyond at his own charge.

JOHN. For God's sake!

OWEN. It's truth I'm telling you, men. Oh, God's not too hard on a body, and maybe things 'll be better than they're shaping with me from this out.

Several men come in here and sit down in various corners of the kitchen. One of them is a stranger. He is a tramping man, obviously, not a peasant.

JOHN. There'll be a full house before morning. (*To the Stranger.*) Can you find a seat, Stranger?

STRANGER (*sitting down. Loudly*). And so ould Peg's underboard? She'd a long run of it. (*Taking a bottle out of his pocket, in a wheedling voice, to Owen.*) Will you take a pull at it, man of the house?

OWEN. No, thank you.

STRANGER. A dawny drop?

JOHN. Put up that bottle. There'll be no drinking here. No drinking, I say.

STRANGER (*coarsely*). No drinking? Well, it's a poor wake a body can't get a drink at.

SEVERAL MEN. Put that man out. He's drunk. Put him out.

The women about the room door look uneasy.

OWEN. Decency's decency. The corp's lying in there, and we're putting the women through their prayers.

STRANGER. It'll take a deal of praying to whitewash her!

VOICES. Throw him out! Put him out, Owen!

OWEN. Well, decency's decency, as I say. The stranger's dead with us, and we must be quiet.

STRANGER. Well, I've told no lie, have I?

JOHN. What do you know about the woman ?

PARRY. Ay, what do you know about her, mister honey ?

OWEN. Quiet now, Parry.

COLUM (*breaking in*). That man knows more than you think. (*To the Stranger*.) You're one of the tinker clan from the glen, aren't you, mister ?

PETER. He is not. He's a farmhand down at Ewart's. I've seen him before.

COLUM. A farmhand ! You're out, Peter. He's a strolling man if he's anything. Look at him ! Look at the twisty gob of him. Begob, if the peelers smell him there'll be the devil to pay.

STRANGER (*wobining*). Well, you're damned hard on a stranger. I came in off the road, and my feet welted walking long miles. . . .

COLUM. Didn't I tell you ? Was there an arrest yet, Owen ?

JOHN (*to Colum*). Hold your tongue and sit down there.

OWEN (*quietly*). There'll be no hard words, Colum.

STRANGER. He's a gabby bastard.

VOICES. Out him ! Don't let him sit here.

STRANGER. He's a gabby whore, he is. And he's done worse on that woman, if ye knew it, than ever I did (*With bottle, to Owen*.) Have a drink, man of the house. (*To Colum, menacingly*.) I'm not here for fighting, but if any man wants fighting he'll have it.

OWEN. You must be quiet.

STRANGER. He'll have it, I say, if he wants it. I'm not a bit afeard of him.

COLUM. He'd a hand, that man, in Peg's death, if I know anything.

OWEN. Well, if he had, there'll be no informing. That's not our business. (*To the Stranger*.) Maybe it would be as well for you to get out of this, my good man.

STRANGER. And me a peaceable man ! I'm not for fighting, I tell you.

COLUM. And what are you here for ?

STRANGER. I came in to drink my drop to the dead,

Judgment

quiet and peaceable-like if you'd let me. But you wouldn't, you'd be to be saying dirty things against me. I'm a decent labouring man, and I've got my bit in my time by the craft of my own hands; and if I am a stroller itself, it's no disparagement. The woman you're waking there was no better.

JOHN. Leave him alone, and he'll be quiet.

The tension eases down somewhat. The Stranger breaks into a verse of a song.

As I walked down thro' Dublin City
At the hour of twelve in the night,
Who should I see but a Spanish lady
Washing her feet by candlelight.

First she washed them, and then she dried them
Over a fire of amber coal:
Never in all my life did I see
A maid.....

JOHN (*endeavouring to talk the song down*). When'll the coffin be here, Owen?

STRANGER. Can't you listen? It's a good song.

Never in all my life did I see
A maid so neat about the sole!

JOHN (*to Owen*). In the morning?

STRANGER. Oh, very well then. (*He drinks to console himself for the company's lack of interest in his music.*)

OWEN. Toal promised it for the morning, sure. He'd a lock of clean deal boards in the yard, and says he, "They'll make as tidy a coffin as ever a beggar was trenched in! I'll put the joiner to it before night," says he, "and he can work in the barn there by candlelight, and it'll be ready for you to lift by eight the-morrow morning."

JOHN. You've bespoke a car?

OWEN. Ay, Shanley's. Mick'll take it out for me, and we'll coffin old Peg, and the funeral'll be ready to start for Mevagh by twelve.

PARRY. Just late enough, Owen. The evenings drop down very quick now.

JOHN. We'll be at Mevagh by three.

COLUM. How far is it?

JOHN. It's the most of twelve miles.

PARRY. And a dark, mountainy road, too, with sloughs and sudden turns.

OWEN. We can take a couple of handlamps, if we're put to it.

JOHN. It's twelve miles, every inch. I mind travelling it when Shan Aosta was buried.

PARRY. Shan Aosta? (*Reminiscently.*) Ay. That makes me think that I'll be going myself soon.

JOHN. Indeed and you won't, Parry. You're as young as any of us.

COLUM. The pension's safe, Parry, for five years at least.

PARRY. Five is it, mister? Five years! (*Viciously.*) Why, I'll be drawing my money when the crickets are whistling through your death-shift! (*The men laugh.*) And now where are ye?

JOHN. You're a wonder, Parry.

PARRY (*emotionally*). Well, I'm an old man, God forgive me, but I've a young heart.

COLUM. And the world'll never beat that, you boy, you.

PARRY (*to himself, almost crying*). Och, but it's a poor thing to be old, and all your colt-tricks over, and you with nothing to do but to be watching the courses of the wind. (*He sits with his staff between his legs, his chin resting on the handle of it, muttering into himself.*)

JOHN. Cheer up, man. You're as young as any of us, I'm saying.

COLUM. You mind Peg Straw when she was a girl, Parry?

PARRY (*pleased at Colum's deference*). Faith I do, then.

Judgment

COLUM. Who was she at all ?

PARRY (*ironically*). Who was she ! Well, it's a poor enough story, man, if I was to tell it to you.

SEVERAL MEN. Tell us the story, Parry. (*Parry "takes the stage."*)

COLUM. She wasn't a native of these parts, was she, Parry ?

PARRY. She was not. (*In the manner of the professional shanachy.*) She was from Sligo, they say ; from beyond Loch Melvin, anyway. I mind—ach, it's well I mind—the first day I saw her. It was in Ardara Fair. That's upwards of forty years ago now. (*To Colum.*) It was before your time, Colum.

COLUM. Well, I'm an older man than you'd think, Parry.

Kate Kinsella comes in here, and crosses over to Owen.

OWEN (*whispering*). How is she ?

KATE. She's holding her own—better something, I'd say—and the child's sleeping sound. I left Mor, the cousin, to keep an eye to them. (*She goes to the bedroom door and comes back.*) Oh, and Father John was in on his way over to Shanley's. He said he'd be up here later. (*She goes into room.*)

OWEN (*to Men*). She's better, Kate says.

JOHN. God be praised for it.

PETER. She'll get over it. She was upset, the woman, with what happened.

COLUM. Some do be mortal 'feared of the dead.

PETER. They do, that.

JOHN. And how is the child, Owen ?

OWEN. He's thriving well.

JOHN. It's great news, great news.

COLUM. Go on, Parry.

PARRY. And now for ye . . . Where was I ? Ay. (*Proceeding.*) She was a good-looking girl, decently enough put on, and not a bit like her trade. Selling besoms she was. I bought a besom off her and I heard her speak. She had a soft tongue—soft like the Connacht

folks—and she had a good face, and dark, kindly eyes. She was nineteen, I would say, and decently reared, by her look. A week after she came to my sister's door, begging. I was within—it was a wet day, men, as wet a day as ever dropped from heaven—and I went out to her. She had a child in her arm. I looked at her, and she looked at me. "It's my own," says she. "It was born in my father's house, and the door was shut on me," says she, "and I had to take to the roads. The priest was the cause of it all," says she.

JOHN. (*interrupting*). And that's what I'm always saying. They do be too hard on her like sometimes. Now, if . . .

PARRY (*in the same voice—not heeding the interruption*). "He turned my people against me, and so I had to go."

STRANGER (*listening drunkenly*). It's true enough, ould fellow!

PARRY (*proceeding*). That was her story, men, whether it's true or not.

STRANGER. Devil a lie in it, gaffer.

PARRY (*appealing for support*). You know it as well as myself, men, only you'd know it by hearsay, maybe. Well, time passed, and one fine day, they say, the child disappeared.

COLUM. Disappeared?

PARRY. Ay.

SEVERAL MEN. What became of it?

PARRY. I'll leave that to yourselves. You're not goslings.

JOHN. It beats one what to think.

PARRY. There she was, like Hagar, walking the roads, picking the water-grass or the bent-grass as she walked. And she carrying a burden that another put upon her. (*Suggestively*.) She'd be free-handed if she could, wouldn't she?

COLUM. You mean, she . . .

STRANGER. She murdered it, like? She . . . (*He half*

rises from his seat, and the bottle crashes to the floor). God damn it! (*Tauntingly*.) She murdered her child!

VOICES. Shut up! Get him out, Owen, if you can.

JOHN. For pity sake sit down where you are, and listen like a Christian man.

STRANGER. Listen? And it's you'd have me listen!

(*Singing*.) Never in all my life did I see . . .

JOHN. Sit down.

STRANGER. Wasn't I listening? (*Uproar*.) Well, (*collapsing*.) could Paul here says it, and it's . . .

COLUM. Oh, the man's drunk. Go on, Parry.

PARRY. I'm not sure of it, as the thing didn't happen in this part of the country. It was about Killybegs it happened. But this I know, that she there (*motioning next the room*) was in gaol for a spell.

STRANGER. For a spell! (*He laughs coarsely*.)

PARRY. After she got free she took to the strolling again, and I saw her one day in Ardara, a much-changed woman. It's singing ballads she was, and the child wasn't with her.

STRANGER. No, she'd drowned it! (*He laughs*.)

PARRY (*turning on him*.) You're a gallows man, mister.

STRANGER. That's me.

PARRY. A shameless, kindless man. (*He rises to his feet, fairly trembling with passion*.)

STRANGER. You say it?

PARRY. I do. It's a queer look is on you. God help you! A queer, hang-dog look. The hemp is grown that will choke you. It is to the . . .

The rest of his speech is lost in a racket of voices and tumbling chairs. Several men are about Parry holding him down. He keeps on shouting, "And now where are ye!" in his thin, piercing, old man's voice.

JOHN. Well, if Father John comes in, it won't be telling you, Parry. (*The noise subsides gradually*.)

OWEN (*in comparative silence*). Will you answer me

this, Parry, and you, Stranger? (*There is a hush. Owen is listened to as one commanding respect.*) Why is it when a man's soul is in his body, and he lusty and well, you think nothing of kicking him about as you would an old cast shoe? But the minute the soul goes, and the body is stiffening in death, you draw back from him, hardly daring to touch him for the dread that is on you. Will you answer me that? And it's a woman is there, God help me . . . a strolling woman, but still a woman. (*Appealingly.*) For God's sake sit down, men, and be decent in the presence of death.

STRANGER. It's bloody lies he's been telling, man of the house. (*Several men rush at him and hustle him about the kitchen. The women try to separate them.*) Lay me go! Ye'd spancel me, would ye? (*To Owen.*) Bloody lies. He says she did away with her child . . . (*Solemnly.*) Myself, that's standing before you now.

The men look at each other. Silence falls on the room.

COLUM (*unconvinced*). He's raving drunk, the man.

STRANGER. Lay me go! Lay me go, I tell ye!

The men release him.

COLUM. Who'd heed him? He's mad.

STRANGER (*raising his right hand*). Well, that the God in Heaven may strike me dead if I'm not that woman's son!

There is a stillness which can be felt. Owen Ban stands apart, looking curiously at the Stranger. Father John enters, left. He is a spare man of about 65, with iron hair, and a set, masterful face, which softens at times into an expression of benevolence. He wears a felt hat and cloth leggings. He has a knitted muffler about his throat, which he loosens as he comes through the door. The men look from one to the other.

FR. JOHN (*quietly, but with authority in his voice*). Good-night to ye, men.

SEVERAL MEN (*timidly*). Good-night, Father.

FR. JOHN (*advances a pace and treads on the broken bottle. Sharply*). There's been drinking, men? What's this?

Judgment

PARRY (*catching the Stranger's arm. Excitedly*). It was this man, your Reverence. Coming in here with his gallows talk, and saying black words against the dead.

JOHN. For peace sake, Parry!

STRANGER. It's bloody lies he's been telling himself, then. Dirty, bloody lies.

FR. JOHN (*sternly*). Silence, man! (*To John Gilla Carr.*) Who's this?

The men nearest the Stranger jostle him towards the door.

JOHN. The man's a stranger, Father.

FR. JOHN. Leave him go. Leave him go, I say. There'll be no uncharitableness in this house. (*The men unband the Stranger. He stands near the door, a crouching, defiant figure.*) Where's Owen?

COLUM (*of the Stranger*). We asked him to leave, Father . . .

JOHN. We asked him to leave when he came in, but he wouldn't, Father, and there's been some chandering talk.

FR. JOHN. I'd thought as much. I heard it, and I coming over the hill path. (*To the Stranger.*) Better to get out quietly, now. Better to get out, I say. This is no place for y o u r like.

STRANGER. Well, I'm a peaceable man. I tell you I'm a peaceable man, but I'll go if you want me. (*He shuffles to the door. In a whining voice.*) It's hard the poor get it, and it's a black welcome is for the stranger. (*Defiantly.*) You've your fine house and your cabbage garden, and your broadcloth coat to wear, and your dues at Christmas and Easter. (*Uproar and voices. "Out with him! Throw him out!" Raising his voice.*) Well, gulder me down, do! I never said nothing against that woman. I never said nothing against her. I'm her own blood . . . (*Owen looks as if he wanted to speak.*) I'm her own blood, and if I am, itself, the outside of the door is good enough for me, and a going foot on the hard road. God help me! (*He opens the door, then turns round to the crowd and says half comically.*) Good-night to ye.

He goes out. The men look pitifully after him.

FR. JOHN (*after a pause, to Owen*). Who is that man is just gone out ?

PARRY. He's a strolling man, Father, and . . .

FR. JOHN. I didn't ask you. It was Owen I asked OWEN (*coming forward*). He's a stranger, Father. I know no more of him than you know yourself. He came in here . . . I wouldn't say he was drunk, Father, but he had drink taken . . . and he started arguing with Parry about the poor woman that's lying dead in that room.

PARRY (*viciously*). He said black words against her, Father.

OWEN (*quietly*). He said he was her son, Father.

FR. JOHN. Her son ?

OWEN. Her son, Father.

FR. JOHN (*reflectively*). Ah. He said no more than that ?

OWEN. No, Father. (*With a certain awkwardness.*) Well, he hinted as much as that he was the child everybody said she had done away with, and it only a young helpless thing at the breast.

FR. JOHN. This was common talk in the parish ?

OWEN. It was, Father, and beyond it.

FR. JOHN. You believed it ?

OWEN. It's an old story. It's been talked about as long as I mind. Parry will tell you.

PARRY. It may be true, and it may not be. There's no knowing.

COLUM. He's a gallows bugger, that. I didn't like the way he spoke about the woman.

PARRY. He's gone now, and peace be after him.

JOHN. It's hardly for us to judge him, or h e r either.

OWEN. You're right, John.

JOHN. It was only "dubhairt sé, dabhairt sé." That's the kind of talk it was. One said she'd killed the child, and another said she hadn't. And that walking man, God help us! You couldn't tell who

he might be. There was something queer about him. It looked like a warning.

Owen is agitated.

FR. JOHN. What's troubling you ?

OWEN. Oh, God love you, Father.

FR. JOHN. What is it ?

OWEN. I'm thinking of what you said at the Month's Mind at the Cross a' Monday.

FR. JOHN. What was that ?

OWEN. That it's not for us to have a bad word of anybody. You're always saying it, Father.

FR. JOHN. (*to himself*) "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified."

OWEN. It's queer the way things have happened with me.

FR. JOHN. God has His own way and His own time. (*To the Men.*) You know nothing of that man, any of you ?

OWEN. Peter MacManus might know, maybe. You were saying, Peter

PETER (*not too sure of himself*). Well, I wouldn't swear to it, Father, but I think he was a farmhand for a spell down at Ewart's. In the demesne, Father. I've seen him before somewhere, I know.

PARRY. You know nothing.

PETER (*humbly*). I'm an ignorant man, Father.

FR. JOHN. We're all ignorant—all. (*There is a pause. Father John crosses, right, and stands with his hand on the edge of the chimney board, looking thoughtfully into the fire. His back is to the proscenium. He turns round then slowly, and speaks to the people.*) It's a strange end. The hidden things of His wisdom God makes plain to us. (*He would say more, but stops.*) No, nothing is plain. . . . Clouds are about us. . . . We pry and dream; the mystery remains dark. (*He faces the room door, goes forward a step, and stretching out his arm speaks as if to the dead woman.*) "Woman, where are those thine

accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee." (*Owen Ban kneels down. The people all drop on their knees.*) We will say the Prayers for the Dead. (*Kneeling.*) "Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam, et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitatem meam. Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea," &c.

(THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY.)

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